

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

All communications for this paper should be accompanied by the name of the author, not necessarily for publication, but as evidence of good faith on the part of the writer. Write only on one side of the paper. Be particularly careful in giving names and dates, to have all letters or figures plain and distinct.

The Gambler's Fatal Passion—A Sad Story.

The court-martial of Lieut. Wm. M. Fleming, U. S. A., upon charges of embezzlement of public funds, conduct unbecoming an officer and gentleman, and violation of the Articles of War, took place at Alcatraz Island, near San Francisco, on May 23. The prisoner pleaded guilty to all the charges, but introduced several brother officers as witnesses to testify to his former good character in mitigation of his offense.

The Judge Advocate said the prosecution had no testimony to offer in rebuttal of testimony as to Fleming's good character. On the contrary, the Court admitted that his character was, as stated previously to the occurrences mentioned. Fleming then read the following statement to the Court:

"GENTLEMEN OF THE COURT: The charges upon which I have been arraigned before you and the pleas I have made thereon tell a dreadful story. I know full well that I need not relate it to you, for you can not but appreciate it before I attempt to utter it. The transactions recited in these charges and specifications reveal dishonesty on my part. Let me then, at this supreme moment, perhaps the culminating one in my military career, make a frank and honest statement to you. It will at least relieve a spirit that is broken, a mind that is surcharged and oppressed by the weight of the awful miseries I have brought upon me and mine. I am yet a young man; am 30 years of age; I was well born; I was reared under influences and surroundings which were kindly and propitious. I am a graduate of the finest military school in the world. I belong to a profession which, thank God, in our country is universally acknowledged to be the finest of any of the branches of public service. My associations, companions and friendships have been with men who are an honor and ornament to their profession; and previous to these occurrences I was well thought of. I have introduced some testimony on this subject. I have a loving, faithful and devoted wife.

"Thus briefly stated then, I stand before you a man who should have had a future. I have only a past, and a horrible past it is at this point to contemplate. Would you know what has wrought this ruin? It is passion for gambling. That passion absorbed all my other passions, instincts and emotions—my entire being. That I have this passion and have been unable to control it, I honestly think is hardly my fault. It is easy for men who have no such overmastering passion, who have stronger wills and better balanced minds, to shrug their shoulders and thank God that they are not as certain other men are. I make no claim for clemency in my case, for there is nothing to base one upon; but I ask, nay, I entreat, that you and those whose duty it shall be to read this record, consider the circumstances of it as mercifully as you can. The Government, as I understand it, is not a dollar loser at my hands, but that lessens not one iota the heinousness of my offense. I did not intend—I have not at any time intended—to deprive others of what belonged to them. I gambled away first what was my own—and that, even, I could ill afford to lose. I was robbed by a lot of thieving sharks. Having money which belonged to others in my possession, my brain being frenzied and my blood on fire, I took a small portion of it, hoping, and even in my foolhardiness believing, that luck would turn in my favor, and I could thus, and from those to whom I had lost, regain what I had lost. By that act I became, as you can all understand, doubly and trebly involved. I was involved pecuniarily; I was involved with conscience; I was involved and entangled in many other ways.

"Whatever may be thought or said upon the subject, the impulse which prompted the next step was honest in its nature. It was to restore that which I had taken belonging to others. I knew of no way to do it except by again attempting fate at the gaming-table. I did it on the night of March 6, and lost that night \$1,450. I need not tell the

rest of the story. I save myself from its recital. The subsequent steps were all taken in desperation, despair, and, finally, in utter abandonment. The road I took and the objects on the way are familiar to you, by precedent and tradition, as the streets you traverse as you go to your stations or places of business. Having in the days when I gambled what was simply my own a prescience of the fate to which this awful passion for gambling was hurrying me, I often took vows and made resolutions and pledges that I would never gamble again. I did not keep them. I could not keep them.

"I will not pain and worry you by further uncovering the causes, facts and incidents which have made a wreck and a ruin of what might have been an honorable and creditable career. I have written to my family a statement of what I have done, and I hope and expect that all the money I have taken in these various ways will eventually be restored to those to whom it belongs. I have promised and pledged myself that such restitution shall be made. I refrain from making such a pledge to you or to any one else, realizing how little weight it should, from the circumstances of the case, receive.

"Now I leave my case with this frank and honest statement with you, and I repeat what I have substantially said before: I have no claim for clemency. I supplicate for mercy."

The prisoner was visibly affected while reading this statement, and upon the conclusion handed the document to the Court and retired to the room where he is kept closely guarded. After he had retired the court-room was cleared, and the Court proceeded to deliberate upon the case. The proceedings can not be divulged except by the proper authorities after the approval of the findings of the Court. The statute renders it obligatory upon the Court to sentence the prisoner to the Penitentiary, and allows the imposing of a fine. The Court may sentence for life, but it is probable that Fleming's term of imprisonment will be about ten years, although nothing can be authoritatively stated. The approved sentence will not be returned from Washington for a month at least, and in the meantime Fleming will remain in confinement at Alcatraz. His poor wife, who deeply feels the disgrace brought upon her unfortunate husband, has remained with him as much as possible, but as she would be obliged to part from him soon at best, she will return to her home in the East in a few days.—*San Francisco Call.*

A Strange Bird Story.

L. Page and son, cutting wood near San Jose, noticed for several days that a number of birds remained constantly upon a tree near them, some going and coming from time to time. Upon cutting down the tree, they discovered a limb with a hollow cavity, some two feet in length and three or four inches in diameter, in which were two full-grown birds of some goodly-sized species. There was a small aperture through which the birds were supplied with food from their mates. The limb was cut and the birds liberated. They were neither of them able to fly, having evidently never been out of their imprisonment. How they came inside is a question. It is probable that the mother bird was small, and though able to make her nest in the hollow of the tree and rear her young, could not extricate them, and they did not gain strength enough to help themselves until the hollow had so closed that escape was impossible. Those who examined the birds think they are about two years old. They had been fed from their birth by their bird-fellows through the aperture in the limb of the tree. A nobler instance of devotion, even the human family never exhibited.—*San Jose (Cal.) Mercury.*

—The cucumber season has set in, and a man is waked up at 2 o'clock in the morning, after dreaming that an elephant is sitting on his equator, to experience a violent regret that he has not attended church more regularly in his youth.—*Norwich Bulletin.*

—The Atlantic says some young women are too beautiful to die young. They do around here, however, and the same grand, inflexible, inscrutable law of nature preserves a maiden as plain as the back side of a tombstone to the age of 97.—*Norwich Bulletin.*

The English Black Book.

Among the official documents lately published by the British Government is a curious book, bound in black and printed in Brixton prison. This enormous volume contains the names and aliases of more than twelve thousand professional offenders, and is stored with valuable information relating to the criminal classes of Great Britain.

In accordance with a law passed some years ago, a vast criminal cyclopaedia was compiled by governors of prisons throughout the United Kingdom. Up to the beginning of last year nearly one hundred and eighty thousand individuals, men and women, had been inscribed on this general list and a summary of their biographies recorded. This work had the capital fault of being too elaborate, and the Home Secretary was authorized at the last session of Parliament to prepare an abstract of it. The new volume, which will henceforth be known as the Black Book, describes only those who have been found guilty of felonies, or who have been repeatedly convicted of misdemeanors. It is, in short, a dictionary of professional criminals, and as such will be distributed to inspectors of police throughout Great Britain, as well as to the governors of prisons. We need not point out its usefulness to the former, as a means of fixing identity and determining the importance of a given arrest, or to the latter as an aid to gauging the sincerity of the repentance professed by a given prisoner.

It is understood that the catalogue will be forwarded to the police of the several Continental States and of this country, and very properly, since it comprises the names of more than a hundred individuals of foreign birth. Among these cosmopolitan criminals we find a notice of Augustus Winterhalter, who escaped one day from jail in Constantinople, and turned up a few months afterward as a forger in New York. It is stated by Lieut.-Col. Du Cane, who supervised the publication, that this is the first time a mass of information at once so complete and so accessible has been furnished to the police of any country. The records of the French police are justly celebrated for their range and minuteness, but the volumes holding them are too numerous and bulky to be readily consulted or transported from place to place.

To sum up the contents of this book, it appears that there were last year in England twelve thousand dangerous persons, thieves, burglars, or murderers by vocation, who were temporarily hindered by imprisonment from preying upon society. If now we decompose this total with a view to the birthplace of criminals, we obtain some singular results. It might have been supposed that almost all could be traced to the refuse population of great cities. The contrary proves to be the fact, for London, if we bear in mind the ratio of professional offenders to the whole body of inhabitants, must be placed after a number of counties, several large provincial cities, and some small towns. Even more noteworthy is the distribution of individuals according to nationalities. Of those catalogued, but one-twelfth were born in Ireland, and only 158, or about one per cent., in Scotland. How distinctly this circumstance seems to point to a connection between criminality and defective education, and what a tribute it is to the common school system of Scotland. We observe, further, that of the persons designated in this volume more than two-thirds are males, and that single men are twice as numerous as married offenders.

We may call attention to one more fact brought out by the Black Book, and that is the close relation shown to exist between disease or bodily deformity and criminality. Almost every individual described had some physical defect. Many were scrofulous, and the majority bore scars of some sort, or were marked with the small-pox. What is more curious, as suggesting a survival of the decorative customs no less than of the predatory instincts of the savage, nearly every one of the professional criminals here registered was tattooed. One prisoner, for example, had branded on his left arm six fishes, four stars, as many diamonds, a heart, and two arrows; the wrist was embellished with a bracelet, two stars, and a crown. The coincidence is perhaps worth noting that this individual has been thrice convicted of violent crimes.—*New York Sun.*

HYDROPHOBIA.

Was Prof. Alvergnat's Death From Fright or a Rabid Dog.
[From the New York World.]

HARTFORD, Ct., May 31.—Prof. Victor Alvergnat, a well known French teacher of this city, died this morning, apparently of hydrophobia produced by fright and nervous excitement. The case is a peculiarly distressing one, and has caused in this community universal sympathy and also much morbid curiosity. The Professor was severely bitten by a strange cur on the chin, both hands and one leg on the night of April 30, in the vestibule of his rooms. The wounds were immediately washed with carbolic acid and cauterized with nitric acid. The dog was not supposed to be rabid, but it was stupidly killed by a policeman the next morning, so that this point could not be settled.

Officious people began advising the Professor by letter and otherwise what remedial course to pursue, and some of them insisted that eventually he would be attacked with hydrophobia. This turned his mind to the subject of mad dogs and the results of their bites. His thoughts became fixed on the matter. He read it up thoroughly and brooded over it until his nervous system became unsettled, and sleepless nights ensued. He learned from a physician when the symptoms ought to show themselves, and as the time grew near his excitability grew more intense. Last Sunday he complained of illness; on Monday, feeling no better, he took a vapor bath. Experiencing a difficulty in swallowing on Tuesday morning, he became very much alarmed, and sent for his physician, and two of the most skillful medical men in town were with him by turns from this time till his death. His clergyman also called and conversed with him upon his spiritual interests, to whom he expressed himself prepared for death. The patient was reduced to semi-unconsciousness with large doses of morphia administered internally and by hypodermic injection, but his efforts to swallow beef-tea and milk were attended with great difficulty. Wednesday morning he raised himself up in bed and struck at his physician, but soon became unconscious. At 5 o'clock in the afternoon he awoke from a sleep produced by opiates and acted violently, making it difficult to restrain him from injuring himself by beating his head against the wall. It was necessary to place the patient in a straight-jacket, and this was accomplished only after a severe struggle against the powers of four men, during which the unfortunate Professor exhibited all the severer symptoms of hydrophobia. Other convulsions occurred at midnight, after which morphia was given in heavy doses. He then lingered in a semi-unconscious state until 10 o'clock to-day, when death put an end to his sufferings. His closing moments were quiet, owing to the influence of the drugs. The attending physicians have been divided in opinion as to the cause of death, several claiming that it occurred from intense nervous excitement and its incidental results. However, the symptoms during the past twenty-four hours were strictly in accord with cases of hydrophobia reported by the best authorities, and the post-mortem examination this afternoon developed congestion of the spinal cord and membrane of the brain, so that, in spite of some evidences not wholly satisfactory, the conclusion reached was that it was a case of hydrophobia, the first in the city for thirty years. The whole faculty of the city has taken a deep interest in the case, and the unfortunate man had the best of care.

Mr. Alvergnat was born in France, and served for some years in the French army. He was an expert fencer, and in his youthful and wilder days was the hero of one or two duels. He was a thorough Frenchman, and his attempt to show a class "how they sang the 'Marseillaise' in France" was sometimes electrical in its effect. His feats upon the drum and with the fencing foils also elicited much admiration among his youthful acquaintance. This was very wide, as for many years he has been a teacher at the High School in this city, besides giving private lessons. Last summer he published a French grammar which was highly spoken of. He was a very intelligent, upright and estimable gentleman, and was universally liked. He was about 45 years of age and leaves a widow to whom he was married in this country.